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CIA Clears Aide Said to Help Rebels

But Action on Costa Rica Station Chief Is Assailed as 'Whitewash'

By Robert Parry
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A CIA station chief recalled from Costa Rica for aiding a Nicaraguan rebel arms resupply mission has been cleared of wrongdoing by two internal investigations that did not examine broader questions of CIA involvement, according to intelligence sources.

Despite the legal findings, Central Intelligence Agency superiors believe that the station chief, known by the pseudonym Tomas Castillo, exercised poor judgment in relaying the messages from then-National Security Council aide Oliver L. North, said the sources who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Castillo, in 1984, was one of several CIA officials reprimanded in connection with publication of a psychological operation manual that counseled the contra rebels on "the selective use of violence" to "neutralize" Nicaraguan government officials, sources said.

Questions are already being

raised about the thoroughness of the CIA's review.

One intelligence source said North's messages could not have gone to the station chief without knowledge of higher-level CIA officials, and described the reviews as a "whitewash."

A CIA spokeswoman Kathy Pherson would not discuss the investigations into Castillo's activities or the reasons for his recall.

The two investigations clearing the station chief were carried out by the CIA's inspector general and the President's Intelligence Oversight Board, which consists of private citizens appointed by President Reagan to review intelligence activities. Their findings were disclosed to the congressional oversight panels, but not made public.

An administration official familiar with the probes said that while Castillo was cleared of illegal actions, he was becoming the CIA's "fall guy" on the Iran-contra affair, an aberration from the spy agency's insistence that it obeyed congress-

sional prohibitions against giving arms aid to the contras.

According to several sources, Castillo served as North's channel to the arms resupply mission on seven occasions during the congressional ban on U.S. military aid to the rebels fighting Nicaragua's leftist Sandinista government. The ban existed from 1984 to last October.

The sources said North, then on the NSC staff, used Castillo to pass the messages because the CIA station chief in El Salvador, where the secret supply operation was based, refused to participate in any way in the operation.

Castillo, the station chief in Costa Rica for the past two years, has a long history with the contra movement.

Working under Duane Clarridge, the CIA officer appointed to organize the contras in the early 1980s, Castillo helped recruit the directors of the Nicaraguan Democratic Force, the largest rebel army, in 1983, according to one former director, Edgar Chamorro, and government sources.